

IN THE CLAIMS:

1-9. (Canceled)

10. (Currently Amended) An option-enabling system comprising:

a subscribing station including:

a central server;

a plurality of in-field products networked to the central server; and

a computer separate from the central server and the plurality of in-field products that is programmed to control a transfer of data to and from the plurality of in-field products so as to function as a centralized management system there for;

an on-line center ~~capable of~~programmed to receiving-receive and authenticating ~~authenticate~~ a user I.D., ~~validating-validate~~ an option request for at least one of the plurality of in-field products, and ~~creating-create~~ an option key in response ~~thereto~~to the option request; and

a communications network to relay data from the on-line center to the subscribing station, the communications network including a ~~communications portion~~first component in the on-line center and a ~~communications portion~~second component in the subscribing station, and ~~further includes an ability~~wherein the communications network is programmed to connect the on-line center to the subscribing station through an external communications network and transmit the option key from the on-line center to the subscribing station in response to receipt and authorization of a user I.D., and receipt of a valid option request;

wherein the computer at the subscribing station transmits each of the user I.D. and the option request for a specified in-field product to the on-line center by way of the central server and the communications network; and

wherein the computer at the subscribing station installs the option key on the specified in-field product.

11. (Original) The system of claim 10 further comprising a computer within the on-line center programmed to:

receive a user I.D. at the on-line center from a user and validate the user I.D.;

receive an option request from the user;

if the user I.D. is validated, receive a system I.D. and validate the system I.D.;

if the system I.D. is validated, check whether the option requested was previously enabled; and

if the option requested was not previously enabled, enable the option requested.

12. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 11 wherein the computer within the on-line center is further programmed to generate an option key specific to the system I.D.

13. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 12 wherein the computer within the on-line center is further programmed to:

download and install the option key in medical equipment at the subscribing station; and

verify option enablement in the medical equipment.

14. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 13 wherein the computer within the on-line center is further programmed to send an electronic verification of the option enablement.

15. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 10 wherein the plurality of in-field products~~subscribing station~~ includes at least one medical imaging device.

16. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 12 wherein the computer within the on-line center is further programmed to transmit the option key to a user identified by the user I.D. via one of an FTP or an email so as to allow the user to manually enable the option.

17. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 12 wherein the computer within the on-line center is further programmed to generate the option key with a disablement feature to disable the option after a predetermined time period.

18. (Previously Presented) A computer-readable storage medium having a computer program stored thereon which, when executed by a computer, causes the computer to:

receive an option-enabling request from a user to request an option to be enabled in a medical device located remotely from an on-line center;

receive a system I.D. and validate the system I.D. with data from a database at the on-line center;

compare the option-enabling request with any other option requests for that system I.D. in the database at the on-line center and reject the option-enabling request if the comparison results in a predefined number of matches;

otherwise, generate an option key and forward the option key to one of the user and the medical device to enable the option, the option key including therein software to be installed on the medical device.

19. (Previously Presented) The computer-readable storage medium of claim 18 wherein the generation of the option key includes creating a disabling feature to disable the option after a predetermined number of days.

20. (Previously Presented) The computer-readable storage medium of claim 18 wherein the computer program further causes the computer to receive and authenticate a user I.D. before receiving an option-enabling request.

21. (Previously Presented) The computer- readable storage medium of claim 18 wherein the predefined number of matches is one.

22. (Previously Presented) The computer-readable storage medium of claim 18 incorporated into an on-line center that is connected to a plurality of subscribing stations, each subscribing station having at least one medical imaging scanner that has operational software that comprises modules, where at least one of the modules is optional and not operational and the option key is generated to automatically enable the at least one optional module.

23. (Currently Amended) A method for enabling an option in a device comprising:
receiving a user I.D. at a centralized facility;
receiving an option-enabling request specifying an option requested to be enabled
in the device at a subscribing station, the subscribing station including a central server, a plurality of in-field products networked to the central server, and a computer separate from the central server and the plurality of in-field products that is programmed to control a transfer of data to and from the plurality of in-field products so as to function as a centralized management system there for;

confirming that the option has not already been enabled; and if not,

generating an enabling feature at the centralized facility upon confirmation that the option has not already been enabled, the enabling feature comprising software to be installed in the device;

sending the enabling feature from the centralized facility to the device in the subscribing station by way of a communications network, the communications network including a first component at the centralized facility and a second component at the subscribing station;
and

installing the software so as to enable the option in the device.

24. (Canceled)

25. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 23 wherein the device includes medical imaging scanners and further includes designing a software key to enable the option in the medical image scanner for a predetermined trial period.

26. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 23 further comprising:

authenticating the user I.D. after receiving the user I.D. at the centralized facility;

and

wherein sending the enabling feature includes downloading the enabling feature to the equipment and remotely enabling the feature automatically and without further user input.

27. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1 wherein the software key comprises software to be installed on the equipment in the subscribing station.

28. (Previously Presented) The system of claim 10 wherein the option key includes therein software to be installed on a specified in-field product.